

BNA 03 – Work Was Hell Today

Description

[output_post_excerpt]

BE NOT AFRAID!

Be not afraid. As of now, and always, you have been chosen to receive these important messages and visions directly through the voice of God. This is Enoch, the Metatron, speaking to you from the seventh hea-

BEN: (Polite static reminder)

Right. Allow me to introduce my new supervisor, Ben of the seraphim. His radiation doesn't translate well with my equipment, so this many eyed gentleman will not be doing much talking. Anyway, Ben is present to make sure I don't run my mouth off and reveal things I shouldn't.

We have gotten some requests that I narrate specific events, such as the Great Flood, the Black Plague, or the Amoeba Riots. But I sadly have to inform you that it's the Vortex of Events making the calls, not me. It has yet to show any understanding or willingness to comply with any requests. And I have no choice but to trust it, as I reach my hand into the vortex and let it slither up my arm to slowly connect its wires into the inner workings of my mind. I see a vision... I see myself?... Wait, no, I think I am being pulled into the event. Hey Ben, BEN!? HELP-

BEN: (PANICKED STATIC)

(FOMP)

(INTRO)

Okay. Where am I? We've got sand dunes as far as the eye can see, and not even a hint of wind. A sidewinder slithers its way across a dune, making temporary but intricate art in the soft sand.

This is different. I am myself, but I feel different. I feel hungover. I am possessing a past self, I think. I certainly don't recognize this. And I am surrounded by bright fire. Oh, I'm wearing my mobile transmitter but it looks severely damaged. To be fair, it does usually have a bit of a glow to it, but now it's leaking plasma, and flames are shooting out of it, raging and quickly dissipating into the atmosphere.

Oh I'm quite alright, this fire is not of this world and doesn't know it should be burning material flesh. To others it must look like I'm hauling a raging inferno around, but I'm perfectly safe.

STRANGEL: Hey uh, you're looking kinda hot there.

ENOCH: hoLY SMOKES!

Turning around, my eyes meet a face just inches away from my own. His eyes are rolled back in his head and his tongue is hanging out. It's the face of a dead man. As I am backing away, horrified, I notice it's not attached to a body. No. The head is being manipulated by the hand of an angel. I repeat, I am looking at an angel who is waving around a decapitated head like a talking puppet. Its bloody spine is dangling and the angel is looking expectantly at me, like he just made the greatest joke of all time.

ENOCH: W... what was that?

STRANGEL: I said you're hot.

,the puppet says. I don't know if I'm supposed to look at the angel or his... head puppet. He's using its voice to talk to me.

STRANGEL: Come on, you're literally a pillar of fire right now. Which reminds me, you're fired.

I know him. It's hard to navigate memories of past, present and future at the same time. We did something bad, I think. His name, oh it's right at the tip of my tongue. Wait, did he just say fired?

ENOCH: Why am I fired? What happened?

He shrugs, and the head says,

STRANGEL: After that shit you pulled with Moses? I was sent by the almighty to tell you that 'THIS WAS NOT COOL.' You got them believing all kinds of inaccurate things. And you know what the worst part is? They will believe anything. You know how the boss is. Won't give you constructive criticism to your face. So, you're fired.

ENOCH: Now hold on, you were in on this too, somehow. My head hurts.

STRANGEL: So, you really don't remember.

ENOCH: No, I don't. Could you please tell me? I want to know what I did... so I can at least learn to be a better person.

STRANGEL: Ha! That's rich. How much did you have to drink over there?

I have no idea what he's referring to. He rolls his eyes at me.

STRANGEL: Okay, so. I ran into you on the mountain. You were having a panic attack in a cloud of smoke, remember? No? Those people needed guidance when you took off, and I covered for you. Too bad I had to kill half of them to clean up your mess.

ENOCH: No!

STRANGEL: They were lost causes anyway-

ENOCH: What's wrong with you?

STRANGEL: ... would have killed each other if I didn't step in.

ENOCH: And what's that, who is that!?

STRANGEL: Oh, my friend here? Kept him to show you what you've done.

He holds out the dead head in front of him, to make his point.

Terrible memories flash before my eyes. Powerlessness. Darkness. Smoke. Burnt flesh. Taste of metal. A golden calf? Guilt. Awful, consuming guilt. I really must have done something absolutely terrible. And not the kind of terrible that has been approved, stamped and ordered by heaven. I straighten my back and accept my fate.

ENOCH: So what happens now?

The stranger smiles, and his puppet says,

STRANGEL: That sounds like a you problem. I'll see you around!

He dramatically drops the decapitated head in the sand.

And before I can reply, he lifts off into the sky. The heavy sound of giant beating wings fades as I am left alone in the settling sand.

What...

Have I... fallen? How do you even know? If any of the fallen can hear me, it would be great if you could contact me. You can call upon me using the standard procedure, my sigil is (Static). I should be relatively easy to find. I'm not exactly subtle, lit up like a thunderbolt. Can anyone hear me? I hope this is still working. One antenna is all crooked. Please. Please.

Okay. Be not afraid, be not afraid, benotafraidbenotafraidbenotafraid.

But I am afraid. This is what we are trained to tell humans, because they have nothing to fear when we are there to help them. But there is not a soul here to help or comfort me.

I just... where do you even go from here? I don't know anyone. No job, no friends.

I did have a family once... and two dogs... but I don't want to bother them again. I am so alone. There isn't anyone even remotely like me in the whole universe.

I need to just, uh. Sit down in the sand for a bit. I spread my fingers and sink them into the scorching sand, feeling each grain burning my skin as I go. Not far down, I reach the cool damp soil underneath. It's soothing. I am imagining myself as a tree and that my roots are extending, connecting me firmly to the earth. I am fine. I am alive. I am not afraid.

I've been going about this the wrong way! I'm not alone in this at all, plenty of people have fallen

before. They managed all right... I think. They seemed all right at least, even though I've heard that hell is, well, hell. But as it stands, I don't have much of a choice. It's the only other space for celestial beings other than heaven. I have to make myself a home there.

Right, I can't just pop into any floor of Hell, might end up in a wall. I'll have to use a primitive portal. I shouldn't tell you how to make those, and I am not good at keeping secrets, so I'll turn off the transmission for a bit as I do this, yeah? Won't be a second to you.

(MOBILE TRANSMITTER OFF, AND ON)

And we're back! The desert sand was very loose and difficult to draw in, so my portal didn't specify which part of Hell- oh damn, shush. Anyway. Point is I don't know where in the Hell I am.

So far, it looks very much like heaven. You've got the whole crystal floor, burning walls, and ominous floating orbs above. But as soon as you look closer, you sense that it's not like heaven at all. Light and shadow don't behave quite like they should.

Other than that, I like what they've done with the place. There is no doubt about it, the fallen angels have rebuilt their first home from memory. As I look out from a window I see several damaged structures. A lot has happened with this place since the first great fall.

(METALLIC SQUEAK)

Wait! I hear something! Oh...

I'm forgetting a lot of things lately. Such as Hell being inhabited by more than just fallen angels.

(CREAKING, WHISTLING AND GRINDING NOISES ARE INTERSPERSED WITH ENOCH'S TALKING)

There are sickening noises coming from the shadows. They can barely be called voices, because they sound more like grinding metal. The closest approximation would be the sound of an army of trains screeching to a halt. Whatever it is, they are laughing! Maybe if I ignore them they'll go away – nope. There's one right here. The creature starts circling me, its triangular head ever facing towards me. But it has no eyes. It's listening, scanning, its head splitting into a wide toothy grin. It's no bigger than a dog. I can handle a dog. Ah. Wonderful, there are three of you. Can I call you hell hounds? I don't want to assume- OW!

(SOUNDS OF RUNNING AND HELLHOUNDS "BARKING")

I think I lost them. Interesting. If this layout corresponds to heaven, my office would be down that next hallway to the right. I can hide there. Unless it's occupied of course.

(METALLIC BARKING IN THE DISTANCE)

I'll take my chances!

(RUNNING)

(DOOR SLAM)

That was close. I can still hear the hellhounds when I put my ear against the door, but their vile metallic noises are fading away now.

Huh, smells nice in here.

Nuaah! Naked. There is a naked woman sitting in front of a mirror, with her back turned. She turns halfway to shoot a smoldering glare at whoever dared to interrupt her. But she studies my face for a while, her features relaxing. Watching, listening. The air is thick with a fresh scent of lilies, carried by warm air.

It's been a long time since I've been bothered by physical nudity, but this entity uses her body like a weapon. She is getting up and... walking towards me, framed by a wall of glowing white lilies. No, it's not just her body. It's her whole energy, I can't fight it. And I am metaphorically kneeling at her feet, waiting for my orders, or my execution. Whatever she decides to do to me will be just, and I will accept it. It is a very awkward feeling to say the least. Her hands are coming up to rest on her round hips, and she says:

LILITH: You know I can hear you, right?

ENOCH: YES! Sorry! So sorry for, um... there were-

I politely study the ceiling as she starts to circle me, slowly but deliberately.

ENOCH: I was chased. But that's not why I'm... Okay. My name is Enoch. I was working in heaven, and now I'm not. I'm looking for a job, I suppose.

She's inspecting me from head to toe, and I somehow feel more undressed than she is.

LILITH: Very interesting specimen. What are you?

She dissolves into a wisp of smoke, only to appear close, too close, sniffing my neck.

LILITH: You don't smell like you've fallen.

ENOCH: Hey! Rude! Do you know who I can talk to about working here? I do broadcasts, transmissions, visions and messages to prophets everywhere across spacetime.

LILITH: Oh, Metatron! Why didn't you say so? We can always use someone in media. Come on!

And with no regard to the hellbeasts outside, she walks out the door, swaying her hips as she goes. Seeing no obvious creatures with pointy teeth, I jog a bit to catch up to her

ENOCH: Uh, this is all going very fast. I don't think I got your name?

LILITH: Lilith.

I only ever heard about one Lilith. Murderer, deceiver, seductress, mother of demons, and one of the

kings of Hell. Well, this is going to be my new home, I better get used to this sort of company. But she doesn't seem wicked at all, as we were taught at angel academy. She even seems gentle... when she's not intruding on my personal space. I should play it cool. Ask her something!

ENOCH: So what did you do before you fell?

No! Stupid! Anything but that! But she just laughs and says,

LILITH: I didn't. Here we are!

She ushers me inside a dimly lit studio. It's sparsely decorated, its main feature being the broadcasting station.

LILITH: We only used it a handful of times to spread disarray and confusion... and then sort of forgot about it. I'm sure it's not as fancy as what you're used to. Do you want me to show you know how to operate it?

She traces her fingers along the control panel.

ENOCH: Oh no, that's not the issue. It's... there's no coffee maker. I had a coffee maker in my studio.

LILITH: (flatly) Coffee.

ENOCH: Yes, I got this meat suit into the habit. And I had a massage chair.

LILITH: Well, you can broadcast whatever you want here. Maybe if you're successful we'll look into getting you some human delights.

ENOCH: Broadcast whatever I want? What do I want... Wait, there's no vortex of events?

LILITH: Let's just try it out, you'll get the hang of it!

ENOCH: Wait-

(CLICK- THE FOLLOWING IS SLIGHTLY DISTORTED QUALITY)

ENOCH: Okay, so I just...? BE NOT AFRAID!

LILITH: (laughing) What are you doing?

ENOCH: Starting the transmission, do you mind? Great. Ummm... can't think of a story to tell right now. There are so many. I'm not used to choosing.

LILITH: You could interview me. We're just trying it out, it's fine.

ENOCH: Alright. I have a special guest with me in the studio today! Lilith. Murderer, deceiver, seductress, mother of demons, and one of the kings of Hell.

LILITH: Hi. I don't go by any of those titles, except for King, but thanks for the honor. Lilith is fine.

ENOCH: So how long have you been here?

LILITH: Oooo, flirting already, are we? I was among the first ones. The ones who started fixing up the place and made it liveable. There's not a building in hell that these hands haven't touched.

I glance at her hands at that – they are gesturing elegantly, mimicking building and shaping. They look so soft, and end in long sharp claws. Her movements and speech are so very gentle, and yet there is this dangerous potential. Fascinating woman. I am nodding and humming at appropriate intervals. I notice she hasn't said anything for a while. Oh.

ENOCH: The architecture is interesting! I noticed a lot of similarities with heaven.

LILITH: I know it's not as good as heaven, God is the greatest architect, but it's certainly not bad. The first thing we made was so glorious it actually ended up being our headquarters.

ENOCH: Aha! Pandemonium. Full of torture chambers and hellfire!

LILITH: The one and only. But the torture bit is just propaganda. We can go there later, if you like. Oh, we should try to do a commercial break. I have some work positions you can read.

(COMMERCIALS)

(Inspiring cello music)

Do good deeds to spite God! End the common cold now!

Send your application to Snot-B-Gon, today.

(Cheesy organ music)

Suffering may be holy, but entirely unnecessary, join the fight against depression! At Freudian & Skinner, you can enjoy an office on the top floor of Pandemonium. The view is to die for.

(Menacing synth music) (Whip crack)

It's fun to inflict pain. Don't seek me out. I will find you. (Whip crack)

(END COMMERCIALS)

ENOCH: So, Lilith. You've been here for some time, you must have tried out all kinds of jobs. What was the most fun?

LILITH: Well, Enoch, the one vocation I can recommend is to create a meaningful existence for yourself.

(HEAVENLY CHOIRS)

She lets her hand fall down my arm, and holds my eyes for too long. Well, not my actual eyeballs, but she could hold anything of mine. If she wanted.

(THE SOUND OF HEAVENLY CHOIRS HAS SLOWLY BEEN REPLACED BY AN ARMY OF FLIES)

BEELZEBUB: METATRON!

ENOCH: (dumb shriek)

LILITH: (whispering) It's ok.

Beelzebub, hi!

(CLICK)

(NORMAL AUDIO QUALITY AGAIN)

Wow. I have good news and slightly concerning news. A lot happened between then and now. I'll try to recount the events to the best of my abilities. Hope you're ready.

There are seven kings of hell, that much I know. Who they are, that information varies depending on who you ask. But this one was called Beelzebub. I didn't get a very good look at him, only recall an angry dark green, and iridescent wings. He was Loud. I was more focused on the guard he brought, namely a huge... I don't know, hellfish. They probably have a more fancy name. Anyway. It looked like a red angler fish, just floating in midair. Weightless veils of silk-like fins framed a godawful face. It was more teeth than face, to be honest.

Things happened very fast. I was vaguely aware of Beelzebub and Lilith arguing. I could see the hellfish coming at me with its jaws open wide, and made a move to roll to the side. But alas, my body was too slow. Beelzebub jammed some sort of thick tissue into my mouth and fed my mobile transmitter to the hellfish. And then he picked me up like I weighed nothing and chucked me into the dark maw of the fish. I could hear Lilith shouting "Wait, I need him!" before its jaws closed with a clack.

The time inside the fish's belly was... strange. It was a dark dimension of its own. I don't want to talk about it.

Eventually, I saw light. I was unceremoniously spat out onto a desert dune, and by the time my eyes had gotten used to earthly sunlight again, the hellfish was gone. From my mouth, I pulled what looked like a piece of someone's flayed skin. It had writing on it, and it said,

"Young Enoch,

You have been found guilty of entering hell without an invitation, damnation or an approved guest pass. You have been forcefully ejected under suspicion of espionage. You are welcome back with a properly filled out application next time.

Beelzebub"

So I thought, great, not even Hell wants me. What am I supposed to do now? And Lilith, oh... She said she needed me.

Just as I was pondering on ways of acquiring a damnation, a bright light blinded me and a sharp noise filled my mind. I knew that voice, it was Ben, the seraph! Finally a familiar face.

And Ben said... well, Ben, tell them what you said!

BEN: (Happy static, followed by hearty "laughing")

So basically, it was all a misunderstanding!

Remember I also had some good news for you? Turns out I have not in fact lost my job. God is actually on vacation, and has not sent any messages at all. You know that gorgeous figure I met in the desert, the angel? He tricked me and flew off with his sparkling wings and his stupid shapely legs and I had to go through this whole ordeal! I still wonder what we did to Moses... But regardless, I am back in my studio in heaven! Joy.

Actually, stop transmission.

I have to tell you something, Ben. I'm back, order is restored. And yet... I don't feel any less lonely than I was in the desert. Don't get me wrong, heaven is teeming with angels, but you know. Heh. I'm not a real angel. Not even a real human. Not sure how I could belong anywhere.

Still, I definitely know that this wasn't all for nothing. I felt a connection with Lilith, it's no use denying that to myself. I know it's stupid. So, so stupid. I don't even know her, and for all her loveliness the things they teach about her might hold a grain of truth. I know heaven doesn't approve of this kind of thinking. But this sort of beginning and newness feels so precious. How can friendship be anything but holy?

Apparently I said something very clever right before Beelzebub stuffed my mouth with dead skin. It made Lilith laugh the most genuine melodic laugh I've ever heard with these ears. But now I can't remember what it was. I'll have to ask Lilith, next time I see her.

Resume transmission.

...

Resume trans- Oh it's- oh.

This has been a new segment where I read completely fictional poetry. Hope you enjoyed it. Thanks, Ben.

Destiny works in mysterious ways, they say. A time of uncertainty and chaos has all the potential in the world to bring about things you couldn't even dream of. You will be alright, in the end. You have no say in the matter.

Be not afraid.

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